



**Monroe County
Office of Emergency Preparedness
(585) 279-4110**

Winter Safety Tips for Seniors



Winter Safety for Seniors

A community safety guide for protecting your loved ones



**Monroe County
Office of Emergency Preparedness
(585) 279-4110**

Winter Safety Tips for Seniors

The winter season in Monroe County is an exhilarating and beautiful time of festive activities and wonderful scenery. It is important to remember, however, that this beautiful season can also be deadly to certain members of our community. These at-risk persons include children, the ill & injured, and the elderly.¹ This year, the Monroe County Office of Emergency Preparedness would like to focus on community awareness of the risks involving the elderly throughout this winter season. Specific information discussed in this document include:

1. Falls and other injuries.
2. Exposure.
3. Heart Attack.
4. Carbon Monoxide Poisoning.
5. Fire.
6. Other Information.

¹ *Center for Disease Control Web Site*. 31 Oct. 2002
<<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hsb/extremecold/outdoorsafety.htm>>



**Monroe County
Office of Emergency Preparedness
(585) 279-4110**

Winter Safety Tips for Seniors

1. Falls and other injuries

Elderly persons are at great risk during the winter season due to icy conditions, high winds, slippery surfaces, and snow.

Facts about Winter Accidents:²

- ❑ Nearly 70% of all injuries related to ice & snow occur from automobile accidents.
- ❑ Nearly 25% of injuries occur in people caught outside in storms.
- ❑ The majority of injuries related to ice & snow occur in males over 40 years old.

Protecting yourself & your loved ones:

- If possible, avoid driving during inclement weather. If it is absolutely necessary to travel, rely on a reliable means of public transportation (i.e. buses, medical transportation services, etc.).
- Keep walkways and driveways clear of snow. Use sand or salt on ice patches and walkways to reduce the risk of falls.³
- Avoid going out on days with high winds if you are unsteady on your feet or use a walking device.

More information is available at:

- NOAA Web Site “Winter Storms: The Deceptive Killers” @ <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/winterstorm/winterstorms.pdf>
- Rochester-Genesee Regional Transportation Authority bus schedules for your area @ <http://www.rgrta.com/routing/routes.asp>

² “Winter Storms: The Deceptive Killers.” *National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration*. Dec. 2001

³ *Center for Disease Control Web Site*. 31 Oct. 2002

<<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hsb/extremecold/outdoorsafety.htm>>



**Monroe County
Office of Emergency Preparedness
(585) 279-4110**

Winter Safety Tips for Seniors

2. Exposure⁴

Exposure to cold is a significant risk for the elderly. Because elderly persons are already at greater risk for significant injury or illness, extreme or consistent cold weather can further increase the chances of the elderly becoming seriously ill or injured due to a cold related injury such as frostbite.

Factors that increase the risk of hypothermia & frostbite:

- ✓ Age (Particularly infants & the elderly).
- ✓ Alcohol use.
- ✓ Mental illness or incompetence.
- ✓ Homelessness.
- ✓ Malnutrition.
- ✓ Vehicle breakdowns.
- ✓ Medical conditions such as: arthritis, neuromuscular disorders, and hypothyroidism.
- ✓ Use of medications such as: beta-blockers and neuroleptics.

Signs & Symptoms of Cold Exposure and Hypothermia:

- ✓ Uncontrollable shivering.
- ✓ Memory loss.
- ✓ Disorientation.
- ✓ Incoherence & slurred speech.
- ✓ Drowsiness & exhaustion.
- ✓ Fumbling Hands.

Signs & Symptoms of Frostbite:

- ✓ Loss of feeling or numbness in the affected area(s).
- ✓ White or grayish-yellow appearance in affected area(s), particularly in the fingers, toes, nose, and ear lobes.
- ✓ Skin that appears wax-like, or is unusually firm to the touch.

⁴ Center for Disease Control Web Site. 31 Oct. 2002
<<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hsb/extremecold/outdoorsafety.htm>>



**Monroe County
Office of Emergency Preparedness
(585) 279-4110**

Winter Safety Tips for Seniors

Exposure Continued

Protecting yourself & your loved ones:

- Dress warmly with layered, loose clothing. Be sure to wear clothing that will keep you dry even with long term exposure. Cover all exposed areas of your body, including hands, face, and particularly your head.
- Avoid long-term exposure to the elements.
- Slowly warm areas affected with frostbite, and only if re-freezing is not expected to occur.
- If Hypothermia is suspected, re-warm the body core first, otherwise cold blood returning to the heart from the extremities may cause heart failure.

More information is available at:

➤ <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hsb/extremecold/default.htm>



**Monroe County
Office of Emergency Preparedness
(585) 279-4110**

Winter Safety Tips for Seniors

3. Heart Attacks

Elderly persons are often at greater risk for heart disease and heart attack. These risks can be compounded by exposure to cold weather. Cold causes vasoconstriction (narrowing) of the coronary heart vessels, which can restrict much needed blood flow to the heart. Since elderly persons are often at greater risk for heart disease, it is important to limit exposure to cold environments and dress warmly when entering the cold. It is also prudent to limit any strenuous physical activities in cold weather, such as shoveling snow, which can increase the risk for heart attack.⁵

Protecting yourself & your loved ones:

- Avoid prolonged exposure to cold weather, particularly if you or your family has a history of heart or lung disease, or high blood pressure.
- If you must go outside during cold weather, dress warmly and limit the amount of time outdoors, particularly if you must exert yourself.
- Know your physical limitations. Do *NOT* over-exert yourself, and be aware of the signs & symptoms of heart attack. Be sure to let someone know that you are going out, where you will be, and when you are expected to be back. The signs & symptoms of heart attack include⁶:
 - ✓ Chest pains, pressure, or discomfort.
 - ✓ Shortness of breath.
 - ✓ Jaw, neck, or back pain or discomfort.
 - ✓ Left arm pain or discomfort.
 - ✓ Nausea, vomiting, or dizziness.
 - ✓ Profuse sweating.
 - ✓ If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, go inside and rest, and **call 911 immediately!**

More information about heart attacks is available at:

- American Heart Association Web Site @
<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3053>

⁵ Center for Disease Control Web Site. 31 Oct. 2002
<<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hsb/extremecold/outdoorsafety.htm>>

⁶ American Heart Association Web Site. 31 Oct. 2002
<<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3053>>



**Monroe County
Office of Emergency Preparedness
(585) 279-4110**

Winter Safety Tips for Seniors

4. Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon Monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless gas often released as a byproduct of combustion in fires, automobiles, heaters, etc. Carbon Monoxide is a killer! Carbon Monoxide causes unconsciousness, coma, and eventually death, because it renders the body incapable of using oxygen.

Facts about Carbon Monoxide Poisoning:⁷

- ❑ More than 500 Americans die each year from accidental Carbon Monoxide poisoning.
- ❑ Carbon Monoxide is produced by heaters, furnaces, fireplaces, car exhaust systems, or any other source of combustion.
- ❑ The risk for CO poisoning is greater in states that have prolonged, cold winters.

Signs & symptoms of Carbon Monoxide (CO) poisoning:⁸

- ✓ Headache.
- ✓ Dizziness.
- ✓ Nausea or vomiting.
- ✓ Confusion or fatigue.
- ✓ Chest pain.

⁷ Center for Disease Control Web Site. 31 Oct. 2002
<<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/airpollution/carbonmonoxide/cofaq.htm>>

⁸ Center for Disease Control Web Site. 31 Oct. 2002
<<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/airpollution/carbonmonoxide/cofaq.htm>>



**Monroe County
Office of Emergency Preparedness
(585) 279-4110**

Winter Safety Tips for Seniors

Carbon-Monoxide Poisoning Continued

Protecting yourself & your loved ones:

- Ensure your car exhaust port is clear of snow or debris.
- Use space heaters and furnaces only in well ventilated areas.
- Ensure furnaces, water heaters, and gas dryers are inspected at least once a year by a qualified technician.
- Ensure that all fuel-burning appliances are properly installed and maintained.
- If using a fireplace, ensure the flue is open and unobstructed, and have your chimney serviced regularly.
- Never leave children or pets in an unattended vehicle, especially while it is running!
- Purchase and install Carbon Monoxide detectors in your home.

More information is available about Carbon Monoxide Poisoning at:

- Center for Disease Control @ <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/airpollution/carbonmonoxide/cofaq.htm>
- Rochester Gas & Electric @ <http://ftp.rge.com/SearchAllFrmSet.html>



**Monroe County
Office of Emergency Preparedness
(585) 279-4110**

Winter Safety Tips for Seniors

5. Fire

Fire is a common cause of death in the elderly during the winter season. As many as 900 elderly victims die in fires each year nationwide.⁹

Protecting yourself & your loved ones:¹⁰

- If you use a fireplace, ensure the flue is open and unobstructed, and have your chimney serviced regularly.
- Keep combustible items (paper, drapes, etc.) away from ignition sources (fireplaces, candles, etc.).
- Develop a fire exit plan for your household. Make sure each person has at least **two** ways to get out.
- Conduct fire drills in your home at least twice a year.
- Do not store flammable materials in your home, and keep matches and other ignition sources away from children.
- Do not overuse electrical plugs, and inspect cords, lights, and other electrical devices prior to plugging them in. Never run electrical cords under carpets, over nails, or in walkways that are well traveled.
- Ensure you have working smoke detectors outside each sleep area and on every level of your home. Test your smoke alarms at least once a month, and replace the batteries at least once per year.

More information about fire prevention & safety is available at:

- Rochester Fire Department's Free Smoke Detector & Battery Program @ http://cityofrochester.gov/firedept/smoke_detect.htm
- National Fire Protection Agency Web Site @ www.nfpa.org

⁹ National Fire Protection Agency Web Site. 31 Oct. 2002
<<http://www.nfpa.org/Education/TalkingAboutDisaster/Fire/fire.asp>>

¹⁰ National Fire Protection Agency Web Site. 31 Oct. 2002
<<http://www.nfpa.org/Education/TalkingAboutDisaster/Fire/fire.asp>>



**Monroe County
Office of Emergency Preparedness
(585) 279-4110**

Winter Safety Tips for Seniors

6. Other Information

For more information concerning Public Safety and Winter Weather please feel free to visit these useful web sites:

- National Weather Service @ www.nws.noaa.gov
- Federal Emergency Management Agency @ www.fema.gov
- The American Red Cross @ www.redcross.org
- National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration NOAA), Winter Preparedness @ <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/winter/index.shtml>

Or download these resources:

- Winter Storms, The Deceptive Killers @ <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/winterstorm/winterstorms.pdf>
- American Red Cross-Preparing for Winter Storms @ http://www.rochesterredcross.org/news_archive.asp?id=112
- Help prepare your home and car for winter with these winter safety survival kit checklists from the Center for Disease Control @ <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hsb/extremecold/default.htm>

Learn more about CPR, first aid, and public safety from these institutions:

- The American Red Cross @ <http://www.rochesterredcross.org/training.asp>
- The American Heart Association @ <http://www.americanheart.org/>
- Your local ambulance or fire department

Stay Informed!

Purchase a National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) Weather radio. These radios will keep you updated concerning Severe Weather Alerts and information.

More information about the NOAA Weather Radio is available @ <http://205.156.54.206/nwr/>

For the Kids!!

- American Red Cross Disaster Preparedness Coloring Book @ <http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/eduinfo/colorbk.pdf>